

My Teaching in Media Studies

This essay is an attempt to efficiently address some areas raised by the protocols, but which would be cumbersome to “document” or impossible given the limits of space allotted.

I have taught 141 classes at Northwestern. Much of my teaching has involved graduate students: MA, MFA, and PhD. I have taught both media studies courses and media production courses. At NU, I have never taught a course that I didn't have full control over. That is, in those cases where a curriculum was developed by a committee, I was on the committee. In all ways, regular faculty at NU have full freedom to choose texts, films/videos, and construct instructional design, assignments, tests and papers.

My opportunities, ideas, and practices in teaching media have been shaped especially by the nature of my department, Radio/Television/Film, within a School of Speech (later Communications) since I joined it in 1977. Our department included media makers (film, TV studio, video, digital/computer) and people using historical, aesthetic, cultural, political economic, institutional, and quantitative social science methodologies. I have always regarded this diversity as a strength that foreclosed a too narrow disciplinary focus. Our adjoining departments were Theatre, Performance Studies, and Communications Studies (rhetoric and social science based studies). I have always worked closely with colleagues and graduate students in the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre/Drama and in Performance Studies (which has a substantial concentration in ethnographic studies). I've also had close relations with students and faculty working on sociology of arts and culture in Sociology, and visual anthropology, comparative literature, etc.

I was initially hired because RTF graduate students insisted the faculty had to include someone who understood contemporary theory. A very substantial part of my teaching has been with graduate students, both MFAs and PhDs. Northwestern has been almost unique in having both groups in the same department and taking many courses together. Thus MFAs were expected to take studies courses and PhDs were required to master at least elementary media making skills. As a result, some of my most frequently offered courses, such as contemporary film theory, had both present. This had the pragmatic effect of often including examples of creative work which illustrated or challenged theoretical understandings. I always assumed I should teach effectively to the range of students rather than assuming they were already well versed in philosophical aesthetics, Continental literary theory, linguistics, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, etc. as seems to be the assumption in many literature and humanities based graduate film studies.

In my first years at NU I team taught (with production faculty) a grad course, Theory and Practice, which enrolled MFAs and PhDs which involved close readings of contemporary theory, close analysis of films, and practical assignments for all (one every three weeks) in which students made creative work which worked with the theory topic at hand. Students are evaluated relative to their skill level. That is MFAs are expected to work at

a higher creative level than typical PhDs. I've taught this solo since then. [E.g., syllabus for Word/Screen/Motion]

The core pedagogical idea here is that moving from abstract theory to concrete practice clarifies theory, and vice versa--moving from simply "intuitive" creative processes or artistic experience to general idea.

Cross-cultural analysis. In this class we examined

Undergraduate studies.

Curiously, I've never taught the intro to film studies course, and only rarely film history courses; this was a matter of other faculty being ready willing and able to cover those courses. For many years I was involved in the introductory film and video making curriculum. (At NU students begin hands on production their first year) With Michelle Citron and Ellen Seiter I helped devise and develop several innovative introduction to production courses that combined technical training, cultural analysis, and aesthetics. I also developed media materials, particularly slides and video clip anthologies, for instruction. I was asked to develop a course for the Integrated Arts program which had no budget for equipment or materials. Since public campus computer labs were being set up, I designed and taught moving image and sound media making and aesthetics using the public Macintosh labs. Again, I developed original teaching materials, examples, etc. for the course. When my colleagues saw the results I had with non-majors, they began using Macs for department undergrad majors. Again in response to requests from the upper administration, with Michelle Citron I developed a large enrollment Media Literacy course for non-majors which was innovative and successful. Here again I developed original media materials to support the teaching. [There's some sort of odd statement in the protocols which asks about and seems to assume that developing DVDs is the only thing teachers have ever done]

I have also taught a large enrollment (120) intro to popular culture course oriented around media and music in terms of the changes from folk to vernacular to commercial/mainstream of blues/R&B/soul/rap and hip-hop as well as country, rock, and various international and cross-cultural forms (e.g. bhangra, Tejano, etc.) and questions of subcultures and appropriation, etc.

Throughout my time at NU I have regularly taught History and Criticism of Experimental film and a follow up course in contemporary experimental film and video. Both of these courses required students to attend screenings in the Chicago experimental film community at various sites such as galleries, The Film Center of the School of the Art Institute, the Experimental Film Coalition, Chicago Filmmakers, and bars, lofts, warehouses, etc. and to write reports on these experiences.

Much of my other undergraduate teaching centered on Hollywood. I've team taught a large enrollment course on Hollywood Musicals with Professor Susan Lee, a dance

teacher which enrolled both RTF and Theatre students. Other genre courses have included melodrama and also film melodrama and soap opera, noir and neo-noir, comedy, Black independent film/video, and national cinema on Cuban film, Soviet Silent film, and Hong Kong cinema.

In 1996 the first NU course on Reality TV. The first course on Feminist film and criticism. in 1977.

I designed a new course at the urging of the central administration which was to function as a “capstone” course for seniors--one which would bring together much of the variety of their undergrad major courses. This was Hollywood in the Nineties which combined aesthetic, cultural, historical, and economic/industry/institutional analysis which I’ve offered in several different forms and levels.